

A visual symbol of the monumentality and stability of the judicial system, our courthouses embody a fundamental principle of our country—the courts are open to all.



The Center for Courthouse Programs is part of the Public Buildings Service's commitment to ensure the consistent, excellent, and cost-effective delivery of the new construction courthouse program. Not since the New Deal has the nation embarked on such an ambitious civilian federal building program. New courthouses are being designed and built, providing valuable urban public spaces that enrich our cities. These buildings represent the vigor, strength and stability of the federal government throughout the country.



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our federal courthouses



Over the last several years, our courthouse initiative has evolved into a highly organized program with interdependencies between the various involved stakeholders. The Center addresses four key areas:

Central Project and Program Information Source

The Center acts as a bridge between actual projects and national stakeholders, such as the Administrative Office of the United States Courts (AOUSC), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the U.S. Congress. It provides a reliable single source of information for either program wide status, or the status of one individual project.

Courthouse Standards and Policy Analysis, Development and Implementation

As a programmatic focal point, the Center listens carefully to national stakeholders' concerns and works to ensure that policies are implemented directly addressing these issues. Since the Center is exposed to every major courthouse project, it is able to analyze and solve recurring problems to better the process incrementally over time.

Construction Cost Benchmarking

To ensure that federal funding is distributed equitably across the many competing projects, the Center has developed a construction cost benchmark for courthouse projects that calculates project budgets based on their specific programmatic requirements. All courthouse projects are developed according to the same cost methodology, thereby promoting a level of consistency across the program. Additionally, as new standards are introduced, the Center adjusts the cost benchmark process to accommodate these new requirements.

Quality Assurance

Each project is carefully reviewed by the Center during design to verify that all agreed upon standards are being met. This service provides assurance that courthouse funding is used as intended.

Our History

In the early 1990's following a lengthy analysis of space in United States federal courthouses nationwide, the AOUSC determined that the judiciary's housing was at or approaching a state of crisis; approximately 200 federal courthouses, nearly one out of three, would be out of space within a decade. To meet this critical demand for space, PBS would be required to undertake the largest courthouse construction program in more than 50 years, estimated to cost approximately \$10 billion. The size and complexity of federal courthouses, combined with the magnitude of the program, require a systematic, programmatic approach as opposed to proceeding project-by-project.

In 1993, PBS and the AOUSC convened an Independent Courts Building Program Panel – a blue ribbon panel of leaders in the design and construction industry – to gather advice on improvements to the program. The panel's first recommendation was the establishment of a Courthouse Management Group (CMG) to be the central management organization for the courthouse new construction program. In 1995, the CMG was established as part of GSA's PBS and was later renamed the Center for Courthouse Programs. As part of the GSA's Office of the Chief Architect, the Center establishes an efficient system to manage the development, design, and construction of federal courthouses. The Center works closely with the AOUSC as it established priorities among many projects. Based on the AOUSC's analysis, the Judicial Conference of the United States approved the first prioritized 5-year plan of new construction courthouse projects in March 1996. In subsequent years, after congressional appropriations for funding courthouse projects were finalized, the judiciary revised and adjusted the plan, "rolling" it forward each year for the next 5-year period.

Special Design and Construction Requirements

A federal courthouse is a unique building by any standard. It is a place where abstract concepts of "justice" are translated into legal decisions that affect our everyday lives. A federal courthouse stands as a symbol of the strength and vigor of the United States Government. It must be designed and built with the flexibility to meet the Courts' requirements for today and many years into the future. Its complex program includes a myriad of functions and specialized requirements.

The planning, design and construction of a new federal courthouse integrates all three branches of the U.S. Government. The Courts begin the process by identifying each court's space or functional requirements and then prioritizes a list of projects based on greatest need. While working with the courts, the Center, formulates prospective projects and necessary budgets to meet the judiciary's need. The Center continues to support these projects as they proceed through the executive branch and on through Congress for approval and funding. Pursuant to the Public Buildings Act of 1959, GSA then designs, constructs, and operates the approved facility.

Our Mission

The Center for Courthouse Programs is responsible for providing outstanding courthouses in a cost effective manner by:

- Ensuring a national, programmatic approach to courthouse construction;
- Formulating national policies and standards;
- Establishing benchmarks and overseeing regional performance;
- Supporting regional offices and project managers on individual projects;
- Ensuring a balanced allocation of resources among competing courthouse projects; and
- Identifying best practices and lessons learned.

The Center's centralized, systematic approach to the courthouse construction program provides assurance to fiscally conscious stakeholders in the program, such as top GSA and PBS management, Congress, and the OMB, that it is being managed in a cost-effective manner.

For more information
on GSA's Center for
Courthouse Programs
visit www.gsa.gov.

